

The Suicider (Short Version)

by Josh Cook

He woke up four hours later with the second worst headache of his life. He leaned against the car door, his face against the window, and pulled the handle to open the door, but it hit the wall. He pulled himself out of the car by the top of the door frame but his weight was still in the car so the door closed on his fingers. In pain he flung the door away. It bounced off the wall and closed. After a moment he wiggled and slid into the passenger seat, opened the passenger door, and rolled into the garage. He stumbled as he stood up and tripped over a bag of mowed grass spilling its contents. He got up and stuffed as much of the grass back into the bag as he could before his headache made him nauseous. It was 4:30pm. Wednesday. His car ran out of gas before the carbon monoxide killed him. He'd been trying to kill himself for two months. He was running out of ethical options.

He went into the house, sat down at the kitchen table, and took out his wallet. He had \$27 and some loose change in his pocket. Not nearly enough for a full tank of gas. "Well," he thought, "Been avoiding Drain-O. Such a horrible death. Running out of ways that won't put anybody else at risk and a little more than 30 bucks won't buy much else." He leaned back in his chair. "So much easier if I hadn't been caught with that ounce of weed. [confirm what makes it a federal offense] That and fainting if a blade gets too close. Still laugh at the face Denise made." He slapped his hands down on the table and stood up. "Least it's a nice day. Nice walk to the store."

He put on his favorite cap and opened the garage to let it air out. He took the garbage to and the recycling to curb. He drank a glass

of water. As he walked back through the kitchen he bent over and flipped up the loose hinge on the doorless oven. He left.

“And how are you today young man?” an elderly woman called to him from across the street. She was sitting in a rocking chair in a semi enclosed porch next to another elderly woman.

“Oh, you know, same old, same old,” he said, crossing the street. “How are you doing?”

“Oh, just fine. Just fine.”

“And you, Betty, how are you?”

“On a day like this, who can complain?”

“It's true. How's Tim?”

“Like I would know. He never calls, never sends an email. He doesn't even use that whattayacallit, that book thing, on the Internet...”

“Facebook.”

“Right. He doesn't even use the Facebook.”

“Is he still with the design firm?”

“Oh yes. In fact, he just got a promotion.”

“That's wonderful.”

“He's now, a, oh, it's one of those long titles, what is it Marjorie?”

"A coordinator of something. Sounds like they just made it up to me. More managers and coordinators and chief thises and chief thats these days than people actually working. It's a wonder anything gets done."

"Oh. I remember. He's the Assistant Chief Coordinator of Creative Resources," Betty said, counting off the components of the title on her fingers.

"See what I mean?"

"Don't ask me what he does. He told me when he first found out, but I don't remember. But he's got a lot more responsibilities and they pay him more, so that's good. And the guy he replaced, that guy was promoted and so was the guy before that, so it's a sign he's moving up in the firm."

"That's great."

"Now all he needs to find is a girlfriend."

"He'll find someone. He's a good guy making good money. It's only a matter of time."

"Easy for you to say. You're not waiting for grandchildren."

"That's true. That's true. And how are the girls, Marjorie?"

"Oh, they're doing well. Husbands are good. Kids are good. They just live so far away, I only get to see them a couple times a year."

"Not a lot of movie work in these parts, though," he said.

"I know. I know. But still. I wish they could visit more. Just a weekend every now and again."

“Working as hard as they do, they'll have the money to travel soon, take more time off. Then you'll always have the kids underfoot.”

“I hope so, but I don't know. They found the time to go to London for a week last year.”

“Can you blame them for taking the kids to see London?”

“No. I can't. I went when I was in college and had a wonderful time. But is a weekend now and then so hard?”

“You and Betty should rent an RV next summer. You could drive around and see everybody.”

“Ha. Are you volunteering to drive?”

“I'll keep my calendar open.”

They all chuckled.

“So what are you doing today?” Marjorie asked.

“Oh, not much. Just going to pick up a few things at the store, and since it's nice out, I figured I'd just walk there.”

“That's a good idea.”

“Walking keeps you young.”

“Both of you must still be putting your miles in. You haven't aged a day since we met.”

“Oh, that's sweet.”

“Well, we have been getting out there a bit, now, Majorie.”

“That's true. That's true.”

“We started going to the mall this winter. They open up early for people to go walking.”

“It's nice. We saw George and Phyllis there a few times.”

“Oh. That's great. How are they doing?”

“It was a few months ago, but they were doing OK.”

“George is fading though.”

“He is?”

“Yeah. You don't notice it at first, but after talking to him for a couple of minutes, you see it.”

“That's too bad.”

“It is.”

“How is Phyllis handling it?”

Betty and Marjorie shrugged.

“Is there a good way to handle it,” Betty said.

“It's been a couple of months since we've seen them, since we haven't been back to the mall since it got nice out.”

“And they don't use the Facebook either.”

“Well, give them my best when you see them again.”

“We will. We will.”

“I should get going. Many miles to go before I sleep and all that.”

“OK, well, you have a good day then.”

“You too. Good-bye Betty.”

“Bye-bye now.”

“Bye Marjorie.”

He waved one more time over his shoulder as he walked away.
“Probably should have just driven into a tree. Not certain. Well.”

Mrs. Martin and her daughters were coming out of the convenience store when he reached its parking lot.

“Good evening, Mrs. Martin. Emily. Kate.”

“Good evening. Girls say good evening.”

“Goodood eveninging.”

“Did you walk here?” Mrs. Martin asked.

“I did. I did. Beautiful day. I'm not so far, so I figured, why not, right.”

“I know. I wish I could walk more. But with these two having to go back and forth across the city, and work, and everything, I just don't

have the time. I'm lucky if I get on the bike at home for a half an hour on Saturdays."

"And where are you two dragging your mother around to?" he asked, bent over at the waist with his hands on his knees.

It took a moment.

"Emily does ballet on Washington and I have clarinet on Main."

"And do you like the clarinet?"

Kate nodded sheepishly.

"And do you like ballet?"

Emily nodded sheepishly.

"And what are you having for dinner?"

"Chicken nuggets."

"Chicken nuggets! Sounds delicious. Do you like chicken nuggets?"

They both nodded.

"Are you going to thank your mom for taking you all the way to Washington and all the way to Main and then making you chicken nuggets for dinner?"

They both giggled into their hands.

"I think that's the most you're going to get out of them."

He stood and said, "And things are going well with you I assume?"

"Oh, they are, they are. The girls are doing very well in school and work is going well. Not too far behind on the bills. Can't really ask for much more than an extra week of vacation once in a while, if you know what I mean," she said and society chuckled.

He chuckled with her. "I do. I do. Peter doing well?"

"He's fine. We hardly seem to see each other though, he's been working crazy hours. But he thinks he might be up for a promotion soon, so."

"That's great. Maybe you'll get that extra week after all."

"Well, we'll see."

"I'll keep my fingers crossed."

"Thanks. Anyway, we should get going. Got to get those chicken nuggets on the table."

"OK. It was nice to bump into you."

"Nice to see you too."

"And it's always lovely to see, Kate...and Emily," he said, shaking each girl's hand when he said her name.

"Say good-bye girls."

"Goodood-byeeye."

"Have a good night."

“You too.”

In the store, he looked through several aisles for drain cleaner before the cashier called to him.

“Hey man, you too good to say hello to me now.”

“Tito! Hey, sorry, man, I was off in my own little world there,” he said as he walked up to the counter. He reached over and clasped Tito's hand in an upright, bro-handshake.

“No problem man. How goes the battle?”

“Oh, you know. You fight as hard as you can and then someone you've never met decides who won.”

“Ain't that the truth.”

“How bout you man?”

“Livin' the dream, you know.”

“Tell me about it.”

“No, really, man. I just got a raise here. Maria got a raise at the vet's. Now we can really kick back and chill. Maybe save up for like a trip or something. You know. Like, Vegas. Or Atlantic City. Maria says she always wanted to go to DC, which, you know, that sounds cool to.”

“Man, Tito, you've got it made.”

“I know. I should write one of those self-help books and make a million bucks. Just tell them to marry a girl who doesn't want kinds

and doesn't give a shit where she lives and the rest is easy. Pad the book with like, charts, and quotes and bullshit.”

“I don't know, Tito. I'm pretty sure you married the only one of those.”

“Well, either I'm lucky or awesome and I don't give a shit which, you know what I'm saying.”

He laughed. “You're trip, man. Maria got a sister? Maybe it runs in the family.”

“She's got like, four of them, but they go for assholes with big cars and want to live in house with, like, columns in the front and shit. I got the only one from that family. You got to fish in other streams if you know what I mean.”

“I know. I know. Hey man, I came in for some Drain-O. Where can I find it?”

“Go back in time three weeks or wait a month.”

“What?”

“There was a recall three weeks ago on Drain-O. I guess some real nasty shit got in it at a bunch of factories, which, like, how do you even know what the nasty shit is when you're talking about Drain-O, but I guess something got in, that, like, gave off these fumes or something. Couple of kids died out in California. Real, sad, you know.”

“That's terrible.”

“Yeah, but what are you gonna do?”

“You got any other drain cleaners?”

“Naw, man. Funny story. All that shit's made in the same bunch of factories, and they don't know which factories have the bad stuff, so all of it's been recalled.”

“You're kidding.”

“Nope. All that clog removal shit's been recalled. Have you tried a plunger?”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe you could try one of those snake things, the thing that's metal, with the handle, and is, like,”

“Yeah, no, no, I know what you're talking about.”

“It's going to be awhile on that chemical shit, so it's either that or a plumber.”

“Yeah, no, it's a good idea. Yeah. I'll do that. You sell them?”

“Nope.”

“Is there a hardware store nearby?”

“Well, there's the one up over the hill.”

“Passed the river?”

“Yeah No. Over in the other direction. By the highway. Shit. What's the name of that street?”

“Yeah. Now that you say it, I know what you're talking about. It's over near where you pick up UPS packages, when you're not going to be around and it's one of those packages where you've got to sign for it, or they can't leave it on the porch or whatever.”

“Yeah, that's right. Yeah, it's just another, like, two streets over. Just by where that old department store used to be, you know, that was around for like thirty years or whatever,”

No, yeah, I mean, that was gone before I moved here, but I know what you're talking about.”

“Yeah, so there's a hardware store out there. You just take a left out of the parking lot, got to the light, take a right, and then, the turn before you get on the highway, you take that right. I don't think it's a light or anything. And then it's just p there a little ways.”

“Yeah, I know where it is, there's a stop sign on the cross street.”

“Yeah, and there's like, a carpet store or something like that out there.”

“Yeah, I know exactly where that is.”

“That'll be your best bet.”

“Alright, thanks Tito.”

“No problem man, I'll catch you later.”

“Catch you later,” he said as they shook hands again.

It was a long walk, but he got to the hardware store quickly. He found the plumbers snake, grabbed it and rushed towards the

counter. "Why am I rushing," he thought. "Don't even know when the store closes. Just. Rushing."

"Excuse me," he said to a man in a logoed apron, " what time do you close?"

"Seven."

"And what time is it now?"

The man checked his watch. "Quarter past six, sir. Plenty of time."

"Thank you very much."

"Can I help you find anything?"

He checked the snake's price. "Um yeah, where is the rope?"

"Against the back wall, here, and then all the way on that side of the store."

"Great. Thanks."

"You're welcome. Have a good evening."

"Thanks. You too."

He found the rope. He only had enough money for the snake and cheap rope. "Came here for the snake," he thought. "Thinking a garrote kind of thing. Ridiculous to get that and cheap rope. Really should be the snake or some really nice rope. Don't want to explain change if I bump into that guy. Bad luck with rope so far. Even dad's army stuff. Something always breaks. Snake might work, even if it breaks." He took the snake to the register.

"You're a lucky man," the cashier said.

"Oh yeah?"

"That's the last one."

"You know, I grabbed it so fast I didn't even notice. Must be that recall."

"Yeah, probably. And it's just this time of year."

"This time of year?"

"Yep. More plumbing supplies sold and plumbers called in, in the first two weeks of June than any other time of the year."

"Is that so?"

"What they've always told me here."

"Huh. Now, why do you think that is?"

"No idea. Just one of those things I guess."

"One of those thin--" His wallet was not in his pocket. "I don't have my wallet."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I left it on the kitchen table. Damn."

"Bummer."

"Yeah. Alright. Well. Thanks anyway."

“Good luck with the plumbing.”

“Thanks. Somebody else probably needs this more than I do.”

“Yeah. Maybe.”

“Anyway. Thanks. Have a good one.”

“You too, man, good luck.”

“Thanks.”

He walked home past the park, where there was a bench, facing a man-made pond, that he'd always wanted to sit on. He was exhausted and hungry when he sat on the bench.

He looked into the pond for awhile. Then he walked home. The loudest emptiness in the world. An empty suburban street, at 8:43 pm, in June.

He walked through his unlocked door, brushed passed the curtain of broken ropes that hanged from a beam between the hallway and living room, stepped over the Twister board of vomit stains on his carpet, kicked the empty bleach bottle with one step, kicked the empty ammonia bottle with the next, patted the lid to the aquarium where all the spiders he thought were brown recluses had died, and sat down on the couch. “Put a flight to Australia on the credit card. Everything'll kill you there.” He considered his TV.

He pushed the coffee table and the couch to the side. He put his back against the wall, took two steps, and leaped headfirst at the TV. The entertainment center collapsed and he hit the top of the TV with his paunch and flipped over, smacking his back against the wall and falling into a tangle on the floor. The TV fell back with enough force to be really fucking annoying. He scooted and bent and pushed and

shuffled to extract himself from the position. He sulked back to the couch and laid down.

He was falling asleep stretched out on the sofa. "No point in going to bed," he thought. " Be more creative tomorrow."

